



U.S. Congressman A. Donald **McEACHIN**

The Rural Health Equity Act

Led by Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Congressman A. Donald McEachin (D-VA-04)

The Rural Health Landscape in the United States

More than 60 million people—or roughly one in five Americans—live in rural areas as defined by the United States Census Bureau. Individuals living in these areas are faced with unique health challenges, and a series of studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have demonstrated the numerous health disparities faced by rural populations compared to their urban counterparts.

Rural Americans are more likely to die from heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury, chronic lower respiratory disease, and stroke than their urban counterparts. Meanwhile, residents of these areas also can face limited access to specialty medical care, exposures to additional environmental hazards, and inadequate year-round recreational opportunities to promote physical activity. Communities of color, veterans, and LGBTQ+ individuals may also face limited access to culturally-competent and inclusive health care and services.

Despite the millions of Americans living and working in rural areas, and the health disparities and challenges faced by rural populations, no dedicated rural health office currently exists within the CDC to identify and address these challenges.

The Solution

Senator Merkley and Representative McEachin's Rural Health Equity Act would establish an Office of Rural Health within the CDC. Specifically, this office would be tasked with:

- *Identifying and improving health disparities and challenges faced by rural communities;*
- *Serving as the primary point of contact within the CDC on matters pertaining to rural health, and coordinating within the agency to develop and promulgate policies and programs to improve health care and services for rural populations;*
- *Conducting, coordinating, promoting, and disseminating research regarding public health issues impacting rural populations, including rural minority and LGBTQ+ populations; and*
- *Administering grants and contracts to provide technical assistance to support activities related to improving health and health care in rural areas.*

Endorsements

The Rural Health Equity Act is endorsed by the National Rural Health Association